RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MINOR IRRIGATION COMMITTEE.

MR. A. S. DAMODARAN ASAN (*Mavelikara*): I beg to move the following resolution:

"This Assembly recommends to the Government that all the recommendations of the Minor Irrigation Committee be accepted and immediate steps be taken to carry them out."

Sir, the question of improving and giving facilities for paddy cultivation, by the construction and carrying out of irrigation works, has been brought to the notice of Government on a number of occasions, and, in January 1930, an adjournment motion was moved by my friend Mr. N. K. Krishna Pillai, in the Legislative Council, on this matter, and the Government promised to appoint a Committee to enquire into this problem of minor irrigation. The Minor Irrigation Committee was constituted accordingly, and that Committee has submitted its report to the Government; and the Government order on that report was passed on the 7th December 1931, that is, more than 5 years back. One or two recommendations of the Committee have been partly accepted and acted upon by the Government. But such partial execution of those recommendations has not in any way improved the conditions of the working of the Irrigation Department. The main difficulty that was experienced with regard to the reconstruction and repair of the irrigation works was that the provisions contained in the Irrigation Regulation of 1072 were being strictly adhered to by the Government for the purpose of levying irrigation cess and for the recovery of the cost of irrigation works. As a result of that much delay was caused in the carrying out of the execution of irrigation works. That was the main difficulty that was experienced. Another difficulty was that the Government was not allotting sufficiently large amounts for the carrying out of irrigation works; and there was no special branch of the P. W. D. to promptly carry out the works for which funds have been allotted. So the Committee recommended that a special irrigation fund must be constituted and that every year Rs. 5 lakhs must be earmarked for that fund. It was also stated by the Committee that the provisions for the levy of the irrigation cess prescribed in the Irrigation Regulation must be suspended, and that the recoveries of the cost must be also suspended until all the necessary irrigation works are carried out. The recommendation for the constitution of a separate Irrigation Division in the P. W. D. has been carried out and an Irrigation Fund has also been constituted with an initial allotment of 5 lakhs of rupees. But both these steps will in no way advance the work of the Irrigation Department so long as the provisions in the Regulation are not amended. It would be found that the Irrigation Regulation of 1072 makes certain provisions for the carrying out of petty and minor irrigation works. For these works to be done, such as the repair or construction of canals or tanks, people have to apply to the Government and on the receipt of those applications the Division Peishkar is to publish that an application has been

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[Mr. A. S. Damodaran Asan.]

received for the carrying out of a work, that such and such lands would be benefited if these irrigation works are carried out, and that it is open to parties interested to raise objections if any, to the execution of such works. After such publication, if no objections are received, the people who are to be benefited by the works are asked to consent in writings to the execution of such works. Then the plans and estimates for such works are prepared and sent to Government. After that the work is carried out and the lands benefited by the works will be charged, *ie* the owners of such lands will have to repay to Government the whole or part of the cost or the Government will be entitled to realise from the ryots a cess at six per cent. on the amount spent by the Government. All this procedure necessarily takes a long time; and we would find that though this Irrigation Department has been formed years ago, they have not carried out any appreciable number of irrigation works on account of this cumbersome procedures. This fact has been admitted by the Government as well. I will only draw the attention of this House to two statements made by Government when the adjournment motion of Mr. N. K. Krishna Pillai was considered in the Legislative Council. Dr. N. Kunjan Pillai, who was the Director of Agriculture then stated in the course of the discussion on the motion thus:

> "I do not blame the Council. The Government are responsible for spending the money allotted to the Engineering Department. While they are engaged in other important works minor irrigation is probably neglected. Mr. Vipen has pointed out the defects in the Irrigation Regulation. The old Regulation of 1072 requires modification. Under the Regulation when a minor irrigation tank has to be repaired the people of the locality have to agree to contribute half the cost of the restoration and the Dewan Peishkar should enquire and satisfy himself about the necessity of repairing the tank. Then the P. W. D. should prepare an estimate that should go to the Government and notification should appear in the Gazette. Then the estimate should go back to the P. W. D. for the execution of the work. It takes a long time to go through all these processes and that is why the execution of works is being delayed."

The Minor Irrigation Committee so early as 1930 made this recommendation:

> "... .....We strongly recommend that in order to give a fillip to the development of Irrigation and to restore as much as possible the prosperity of the Agricultural population, Government should waive their rights to the recovery of a contribution towards the cost, or of a cess based on the cost of the work until further notice."

I will draw the attention of the House to another important tatement contained in another official record, namely, the proceedings of the first meeting of the Board of Agriculture in Travancore on the 5th Edavam 1111:

> "The entire cost of constructing and maintaining all the minor and petty irrigation works ma be met by the Government discontinuing the present practice of reaping a share from the ryots benefited by the work."

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Sir, I refer to these official documents to show that even those official documents do not carry much weight. When the matter of carrying out the recommendations had seriously to be taken up, this Irrigation Committee was constituted. A large amount of public revenue was spent on it. About half of the members of the Committee were Heads of Departments and they had made this recommendation more than five years ago. That recommendation, particularly with reference to the main defect in the carrying out of irrigation works, has not been carried out by them. The Board of Agriculture from which much was promised but only little expected by some of us has also made a similar recommendation.

The first step that appears to have been taken by Government to amend the Irrigation Regulation was the publication of the Irrigation Regulation Amendment Bill on 23rd November 1936, that is to say, after these resolutions were sent to Government. Nothing further was done. I want to lay emphasis upon this aspect because that part is the most important matter connected with the execution of irrigation work and the present provisions really stand in the way of the progress of these works. I would also draw the attention of this House to another important fact. When this Irrigation Regulation of 1072 was discussed in the Council, it was definitely assured that though there are these provisions for the levying of cess and recovery of cost they were not seriously intended to be applied as a source of revenue for Government. This is what was stated by the member in charge of the Bill at that time :—

> "There appears to be an impression that the main object of this Bill is to throw upon the shoulders of the ryots more responsibilities in regard to the construction, restoration and maintenance of irrigation works than ever before. Some of the apparently coercive provisions of the Bill may have led to this view ; but as a matter of fact, the effect of the Bill is to considerably widen the sphere of the State's obligation and circumscribe the well-understood, if largely neglected, duties of the ryots."

So it was assumed that though these provisions are there, they will not be enforced so as to increase the burden of the ryots. Even then, the Irrigation Regulation Amendment Bill does not in any way advance the cause of Irrigations. All that the Amendment Bill provides is that the Petty Irrigations would hereafter be called Minor Irrigation and the maintenance of these irrigation would also be taken up by Government. What I beg to submit is that in view of all these circumstances it is high time that the Government should suspend the procedure contained in the Irrigation Regulation and see that these works are carried out as if they are P. W. D. works. That is what was suggested by the Irrigation Committee also. They say,

> "Until further notice, the procedure to be adopted for the construction and restoration of Minor Irrigation Works outside Kuttanad and the area covered by the Kodayar Project shall be the same as for ordinary works coming under the head P. W. Proper."

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[Mr. A. S. Damodaran Asan.]

If anybody looks into the Government Records, he will find that, even for the improvement of a canal costing Rs. 100 or Rs. 200 this procedure is being followed, with the object of recovering one half of the cost of the execution of the works from the ryots, or with the object of levying cess at the rate of 6 per cent. on the amount spent by Government. The main point to which I wish to draw the attention of Government is that the provisions in the Irrigation Regulation referred to above must be suspended. Otherwise, the separate staff for irrigation costing about Rs. 60,000 annually on it, is going to be a waste. With these words, I move the resolution.

MR. S. NILAKANTA PILLAI (*Chirayinkil II*): Sir, I second the motion. The two main recommendations in the Minor Irrigation Committee Report are that a separate P. W. D. Irrigation Division should be established and that an Irrigation Fund should be created. Sir, these recommendations were made with a view to expedite the execution of minor irrigation works. It will be seen that, though these recommendations have been acted upon, the minor irrigation works, chiefly the restoration and improvement of irrigation tanks, have not been executed. There is a large number of irrigation tanks all over the State, and especially in Trivandrum Division, in the taluks of Chirayinkil and Nedumangad. There is a large number of irrigation tanks in Chirayinkil. There are about 120 irrigation tanks. Not a single tank has hitherto been improved. So is the case with Nedumangad also. Though the taluks of Chirayinkil and Nedumangad belong to the Trivandrum Division, only the taluks of Vilavankod and Neyyattinkara have been attended to by the Department. I do not say that those taluks should be neglected. I only say that the other two taluks also belong to this Division; but they have been neglected by the Minor Irrigation Department.

MR. PACODE A. NARAYANA PILLAI (*Vilavankod*): Is it not because, from the standpoint of irrigation, these taluks are not so very important?

MR. S. NILAKANTA PILLAI (*Chirayinkil II*): It is not so, Sir.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The Minor Irrigation Committee was appointed because specific representations were made, in the old Assembly, from these taluks.

MR. S. NILAKANTA PILLAI (*Chirayinkil II*): Representations have been made from Chirayinkil and Nedumangad also. It will mean the neglect of paddy cultivation. Without improving these irrigation tanks, people cannot irrigate and cultivate their fields, and get sufficient yield. So, my submission is that proper attention should be paid in the immediate future to these taluks also.

Another question I have to refer to in this connection is with regard to the Remission Rules. It was recommended by this committee that Government should see that those rules are made applicable to all parts of the State.

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DEPUTY PRESIDENT: How does it come under Minor Irrigation?

MR. S. NILAKANTA PILLAI (*Chirayinkil II*) That is one of the recommendations of the committee. That recommendation has not been taken up yet. There was the real necessity for that.

MR. K. R. ELENKATH (*Kalkulam I*): Is the member aware that a resolution was passed in the Assembly to that effect?

MR. S. NILAKANTA PILLAI (*Chirayinkil II*): Yes. Still Government are neglecting that. With these words, I second the resolution.

MR. K. KUNJUKRISHNA PILLAI (*Quilon I*): Sir, I also rise to support the resolution. I wish to draw pointed attention to one fact. The Minor Irrigation Committee was appointed by Government mainly for the purpose of considering the problem of minor irrigation and also to make proposals for the amendment of the Regulation of 1072. It is stated in the terms of reference:

> "To submit proposals to amend the existing Irrigation Regulation III of 1072 and the Rules thereunder in order to facilitate the progress of Irrigation Works"

The difficulty of the working of the Irrigation Department was pointed out by the Chief Engineer, and he pointed out the existing defect in the Irrigation Regulation and Rules. Therefore, I consider that the change or the suitable amendment of the Irrigation Regulation, is the most important matter that ought to have received the earnest attention of Government. On the submission of the proposals by the Committee, Government have been pleased to convey their cordial thanks to the chairman and members of the committee for their valuable work. Government have considered the work of the Irrigation Committee valuable. I wish to know what stood in their way in moving an amendment of the Irrigation Regulation as suggested by the Committee. Whether Government propose to constitute a separate Irrigation Division, whether they decide to undertake the whole expenditure or whether they decide to do ever so many other things for the ryots—nothing could be achieved easily without an amendment to the Regulation. Sir, we are now able only to make a recommendation by this resolution. This resolution is really a condemnation of the lethargy of Government. We require an explanation why Government did not take action.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT: May I just give you a piece of information? The Trivandrum Irrigation Committee also recommended the same thing long before the recent committee.

MR. K KUNJUKRISHNA PILLAI (*Quion I*): I think on the whole Government ought to satisfy this House why there was an inordinate delay for such a necessary work for which proposals have been made. I demand an explanation from the Government on the matter.

MR. PACODE A. NARAYANA PILLAI (*Vilavankod*): Sir, even six years after the Minor Irrigation Committee reported, we still find that many of the important and urgent recommendations of that committee remain unattended. That does not speak to the credit of any Government worth its name.

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[Mr. Pacode A. Narayana Pillai.]

One of the most important recommendations of the Committee is that in order to relieve the ryots from the very heavy burden they were labouring under, liberal remissions should be allowed to them. Sir, whatever might have been the historical reasons which led to the differential treatment of different parts of the State, no justification exists at present to continue such a differentiation. I refer to the treatment that is meted out to the southernmost portion of the State, that is Nanjinad, which is served by the Kodayar Project. Compare the treatment meted out to Vilavankod and Neyyattinkara with that of Shencotta. We find from the Minor Irrigation Committee report that the tank restoration scheme for Shencotta was taken up on condition that the ryots need not pay for the benefits conferred upon them. On the other hand for the tank restoration scheme that was started for Vilavankod and Neyyattinkara, the condition was that the people benefited should contribute half the cost of the works. Then again, in the commanded area, there is no minor irrigation work. People have been generally benefited by the Kodayar Project. They need not make any half contribution. But the Government have introduced water cess. I quite realise that in the olden d ays there was what was called the Kulam Maramat Department working in Tovala, Agastisvaram, Kalkulam and partly in Eraniel. But after the Kodayar Project came into force in the place of this department, we find that the people were still making the contribution to the State. This is a historical accident. Such a treatment should not at all obtain any longer. In the taluks of Vilavankod and Neyyattinkara, the promise made by the Government in the pre-project days was that the question of tax will be considered by the Government after the right bank channel was completed. That was the definite promise of Government. We find such an undertaking even in the *pattas* granted to the ryots. Even after such a long period we find that the interests of these two taluks have been completly neglected by Government. I ask what the Government have done to these two taluks to solve their irrigation problem.

MR. A. EASWARA PILLAI (*Kalkulam II*): May I ask whether the right bank channel has been completed ?

MR. PACODE A. NARAYANA PILLAI (*Vilavankod*): Even the man who runs can see it. It was not even begun. The question arose whether there was sufficient water in the reservoir for both channels. So the scheme was dropped.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Is the right bank channel relevant to the question of minor irrigation tanks ?

MR. PACODE A. NARAYANA PILLAI (*Vilavankod*): When we consider the question of minor irrigation in these two taluks we cannot but refer to the neglect on the part of Government in not opening the right bank channel. The Engineering authorities were suggesting an alternative scheme even during the project days.

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MR. K. KUNJUKRISHNA PILLAI (*Quilon I*): May I know whether there is any recommendation by the Minor Irrigation Committee regarding the right bank channel?

MR. PACODE A. NARAYANA PILLAI (*Vilavankod*): I do not think I need labour much to establish the affinity between the two topics. The Minor Irrigation Committee reported about facilities for ryots having *ayacut* lands. The major works that were contemplated for Neyyattinkara and Vilavankod could not be taken up by the committee. The problem of Vilavankod and Neyyattinkara is essentially a minor irrigation problem. Government should not lose any more time in tackling this all important problem of irrigation for the two taluks of Vilavankod and Neyyattinkara.

Sir, in the place of the sympathy which the Government are legally as well as morally bound to show what do we find? Under the tank restoration scheme started by Government, Government are realising half-contribution from the ryots.

MR. K. KUNJUKRISHNA PILLAI (*Quilon I*): Is the member aware that in Appendix C of the report, it has been stated that the area commanded by the Kodayar Project is outside the scope of the Committee?

MR. PACODE A. NARAYANA PILLAI (*Vilavankod*): That is also my contention. We are now at minor irrigation and not the Kodayar Project. The levying of half contribution from the ryots for the tanks restored or maintained by Government, works very great hardship on the ryots of these two taluks. Sir, in these days of economic depression when the ryots do not get enough even to pay the taxes, we find that Government are not willing to make any remission of the contribution. Government are rigorously levying the contribution to the very last pie. When there was drought in 1110 and 1111, Government were trying to realise half contribution from the ryots. This is a matter that ought to engage the attention of Government at a very early date and something tangible should be done in the interests of the agriculturists of these two taluks.

MR. S. J. NAIR (*Nedumangad*): Sir, I support the resolution. Four different systems of paddy cultivation are in vogue in Travancore. One is the punja cultivation, for which there is no question of irrigation.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT: That is so well known. You need not state that.

The House will now adjourn and meet again at 11 O'Clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5 P. M.

P. PARAMESVARAN PILLAI,
Secretary to the Sri Mulam Assembly.

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